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S E C R E T ROME 003985

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR A/S BLOOMFIELD, EUR/RPM AND EUR/WE;
OSD FOR DASD HOEHN

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IT](#) [NATO FORCES IN ITALY](#)

SUBJECT: GDPR/ITALY: ITALIANS PROPOSE WORKING GROUP TO
FLESH OUT SIGONELLA SOF DETAILS

REF: A. STATE 207467

[B](#). ROME 3933

[C](#). ROME 2631

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Tom Countryman.
Reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#). (S) Summary. In October 6 discussions with Defense Minister Martino, D/CHOD LTG Castagnetti and MFA Director General Massolo, A/S Bloomfield and DASD Hoehn explained where the Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR) process stood in the U.S. and heard from the Italians broad agreement with the U.S. view of the strategic context and the need for rapidly deployable forces to counter emerging threats. The Italian message was that changes underway in Naples/Gaeta and Vicenza were not problematic and that outstanding issues there could be resolved at a technical level. The question of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) at Sigonella would be highly political, would require a top-level Italian political blessing, and before seeking that blessing, the Italians needed to know more about what the package would contain. Massolo proposed the U.S. and Italy form a working group to flesh out the details needed for presentation to highest-level Italian political powers. End Summary.

D/CHOD - Need to Work SOF Top-Down

[2](#). (S) On October 6, PM Assistant Secretary Lincoln Bloomfield Jr. and DASD Andrew Hoehn held meetings in Rome on the GDPR. They met first with D/CHOD LTG Castagnetti, who said he was confident that Vicenza and Naples/Gaeta issues could be solved, but that Sigonella was very sensitive and Italy lacked specific information on U.S. thinking about basing SOF there. The Italian decision on that would be "100 percent political." The use of SETAF out of Vicenza also had a political component to it, but since SETAF was a NATO-assigned force, it would be easier to manage. Castagnetti said that military-to-military talks could go forward to offer recommendations to the politicians for decisions on Vicenza and Naples/Gaeta, but for Sigonella, he said, a bottom-up approach was not feasible. Its sensitivity required a top-down effort. A/S Bloomfield assured Castagnetti that the U.S. wanted to be together with Italy at every step. He said he was sure that together we could frame terms of discussion that would get us to agreement.

[3](#). (S) Castagnetti replied that one problem would be translating the SOF concept for Sigonella into writing. If something is not strictly connected to NATO, he said, Italy must know about and approve it in advance. SOF operations by definition could not be known in advance. A/S Bloomfield countered that SOF was not of a different legal character than other forces; but some exigencies required timely action that might not wait for formal deliberative processes. The U.S. was seeking Italy's advice, as both the U.S. and Italy understood that latitude was needed to deal with crises we might face. NATO was certainly a part of the picture, and was likely to be involved at some stage in future contingencies, even if not at the outset (such as Iraq and Afghanistan). We shouldn't tie our hands in this respect. Castagnetti agreed that NATO had a role in new conflicts. DASD Hoehn noted that we had a close partnership in all dimensions with Italy in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and that training and other joint work would allow us both to be more effective. The U.S., he said, understood the need to agree on parameters.

[4](#). (S) Castagnetti asked what the projected number of SOF was for Sigonella and was given rough estimates, but was told that SOCEUR would be meeting with IDGS on Oct. 7 and would have more detail. He said there was concern that Sicily did not have the right facilities for SOF, and especially for SOF training as it would be too visible. When DASD Hoehn mentioned the possibility of joint training, Castagnetti was intrigued, but said that so far he was unaware of any discussion of reciprocity in training. Castagnetti said "I would be the happiest man in the world if you could get my Foreign Minister and Defense Minister together with yours on

this issue." He said Italy would be very open and cooperative in the continuing discussion of SOF at Sigonella.

A/S Bloomfield thanked him for his advice and for his positive outlook regarding U.S.-Italian cooperation on this matter.

DefMin - Work details and We'll Support You

15. (S) The Delegation was joined by Ambassador Sembler for his call on Defense Minister Martino. Martino noted that Italy had its most pro-U.S. government since World War II. It approved of U.S. goals in the GDPR and would do what it could, but operated under strict constitutional and political constraints. He promised to "analyze with sympathy" U.S. proposals and see how he could help. He stated that any approach that required modifying existing agreements risked resulting in less than is available now. A/S Bloomfield said the U.S. agreed and would not seek to re-open the existing agreements.

16. (S) Martino directly stated that the only problem is Sigonella, due to political sensitivity and a shortage of training facilities in Sicily. DASD Hoehn pointed out that there were other training sites in the region that could be used by SOF stationed at Sigonella. Ambassador Sembler added that there could be great opportunities for joint training with U.S. SOF there. Martino agreed that other training locations could be worked out and said joint training would be excellent as it would develop feelings of friendship and understanding of procedures, and would be a "great investment of goodwill." DASD Hoehn told him that the U.S. wanted Allies to be inside of the transformation envisioned in the GDPR, a position with strong Congressional support.

17. (S) A/S Bloomfield asked about LTG Castagnetti's advice in seeking a top-down approach on the SOF discussion. Martino replied that the SOF at Sigonella issue was not insoluble but needed to be worked carefully. Italy, he stressed, does not want there to be too much visibility. If the numbers were not large, it would not be a problem. He said that once the military technical issues related to SOF at Sigonella were worked out, the U.S. would have his full support and that of the GOI. He underscored that this would be represented by a strong and cohesive GOI and parliamentary majority.

18. (S) Martino said Italy recognized that we faced a common global threat and that we were all involved. One could not step back and say "let others take care of it." A/S Bloomfield added that 9/11 and developments since demonstrated the need to react quickly, sometimes without the luxury of time for extensive debates back in capitals. The new environment included unpredictable dangers that required speed, and decisive operations before threats could grow worse. Martino replied that speed of deployability was a political, not a technical issue, and a system was needed to allow for rapid decision making. However, there was a trade-off between possibilities for quick action and democratic control. We all want both. "Everyone," he said, "is interested in increased usability of forces." He pointed out that Italy has been a leader in a transformation of usability, with total number of forces going down significantly while increasing the number available for deployment outside Italy four-fold. DASD Hoehn noted that it was no accident that we sought to work most closely with countries like Italy who take the threat and the need to change to meet it seriously. Martino added that Italy, like the rest of NATO, had a free ride on the shoulders of the U.S. taxpayer in terms of defense for 50 years, and saved over USD 750 billion in defense spending because of US and NATO protection since the founding of the Alliance. Now, however, the answer is not defense as such, it is security against terrorism threats. Martino said that once the military-to-military work is done, we could talk about how to support the U.S. plans politically.

MFA's Massolo Proposes Working Group

19. (S) MFA Director General for Multilateral and Political Affairs Giampiero Massolo told A/S Bloomfield and DASD Hoehn that Italy was pleased to hear the President's speech on GDPR

in August (which he said was well-received by the Italian public) and to have the delegation in Rome to follow up. DASD Hoehn asked Massolo for his sense of the way forward with Italy, asking at what level the discussion should take place and in what terms. A/S Bloomfield noted that mil-mil discussion on Sigonella was ongoing, but that it was not yet ready to provide detailed planning information for the consideration of the top political level. We would, he said, be able to be more specific soon.

¶10. (S) Massolo said he could give a positive reaction and feedback, including on behalf of the Foreign Minister. Italy understands the general U.S. perspective and considerations and interprets them in a positive way. He urged the U.S. to continue on the same public diplomacy path opened by the President's August speech. That, he said, would help secure support in the Italian Parliament. We would soon need to pass from the general to the specific and explain some details of U.S. thinking. Vicenza and Naples/Gaeta were "certainly not problems," the issues there could be handled on a technical level, and public reaction would not be problematic. Plans for SOF at Sigonella would have to be better understood by the Italian side. Decisions about Sigonella would be political ones, but first, Massolo said, it must be very clear what will be said to the political level players. What is the aim? What does the U.S. mean by flexibility? What will Sigonella look like in 5 or 10 years? These questions, he said, needed to be answered before the matter goes to the political level.

¶11. (S) Massolo then suggested establishing a U.S.-Italy working group, without publicity, to clarify from a military and MFA perspective the content of the "SOF package" that the Italians would eventually move forward for top-level political blessing. He asked for the USG to send a group for informal and direct talks. "We must explain that there will be forces hosted in Italy that will have to leave for missions from Italy and that it is known and understood that there is a procedure of informed consent for them." He asked to what extent the new security situation would require new elements in this context. He added that his presentation was a result of MFA/MOD/IDGS consultation. A/S Bloomfield replied that the U.S. was ready to support establishing a working group. SOF numbers would be made clear in mil-mil discussions. Post-9/11 the U.S. changed our conceptual view of national security, as we were attacked asymmetrically by non-state actors. He paraphrased Australian PM Howard's remarks soon after the Bali bombing, saying that any leader would be derelict if he knew a terrorist attack was coming and did not act to stop it, even outside the nation's territory. This notion needed to be incorporated in our national security concepts. It explains the need to act quickly. And such action must be viewed as legal and legitimate. We may not have time to go to the NAC or Parliaments for a vote. Recognizing this was sensible preparation for the future.

¶12. (S) Massolo closed by saying Italy broadly shared the U.S. view of the new strategic context and the necessity for rapid strategic action. However, he needed a procedural hook on which to hang it. We cannot, he said, allow a just and shared cause be made to sound illegal. Once we figure out how to do that, the rest will be relatively simple. "Not all of the machinery needs to be exposed to the public, but the explanation must be waterproof." He also noted that Italy needed to do some public diplomacy work with Italians talking to Italians about the coming changes. He said that bases are seen as a contribution to stability, but asked that U.S. commanders on the bases refrain from discussing the changes publicly for the time being. A/S Bloomfield responded that here the U.S. would follow Italy's lead on the process and thanked Massolo for his advice. DASD Hoehn cautioned that there may be public discussion in the U.S. of some details and that we would keep Italy informed about our thinking in this regard. Massolo said he would inform the GOI's public affairs officers to sharpen their antennae. A/S Bloomfield closed the session by saying the USG would let the GOI know what goes up to Congress, would provide more detail on SOF Sigonella issues via mil-mil channels, and would form a U.S. team for the working group.

¶13. (U) A/S Bloomfield has cleared thQs message.

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